

## Hopper's Regrets by RossettiMucha

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**Summary:**

Expecting there to be no consequences when he demanded safe passage for himself and Joyce into the Upside Down seemed a little naive of Hopper, don't you think?

## Hopper's Regrets

The definitive list of things Jim Hopper regretted was a long and varied one.

In first position, it goes without saying, was the premature death of his daughter; young, sweet, vibrant Sarah, with her insatiable thirst for knowledge and her limitless imagination. She could've done anything – could've changed the world in incredible ways - but before all else (before all that she could have been), she was his little girl, with thin blonde pigtails tied up in bows and her mother's smile. She was gone, and he *ached* with her loss.

Right below that had always been the breakdown of his marriage. Diane had been a wonderful woman, and she had deserved more, in those last few months, than he had been able to give her. She had tried to make things work, and he, wrapped in a haze of sorrow and booze, had been entirely unresponsive. The distance between them – insurmountable, in the end – became the defining factor of his life post-Sarah: there was him; and then there was the frosted glass of grief. Behind that, there was everyone else, untouchable to him. He believed that he would never again break through the cloying clouds in his mind long enough to do anything worthwhile - was content to move home to Hawkins, disappear into its obscurity, the mundanity of its business, and just try, day by day, to survive.

That was before Will Byers went missing. Driven by some strange urge – the need for redemption, perhaps, or the muffled echo of the love he once felt for Will's mother – Hopper found himself making a promise he was unable to break; a promise to Joyce to find her son, no matter the cost. And when it came down to it, Jim Hopper, with his armoured exterior and his heart of glass, had done just that. He had done something momentous, and he had felt himself grow incrementally lighter as a result – felt that heart strengthen just a little, working towards flesh and blood once more. It also made his list of regrets so much more complicated. Telling the – whoever they were – where Eleven was had been almost instinctual: find Will, by any means necessary; keep Joyce Byers safe from harm; get out of there alive. But when the adrenaline was spent, and Will was back in

his mother's arms once more – Hopper's own arms feeling, suddenly, so conspicuously, so painfully empty – he began to reckon with the enormity of his decision. That little girl had trusted them to keep her safe - what made Will's life worth so much more to him than hers?

He knew. It was Joyce Byers, and those big, hopeful eyes, and the memory of the people they used to be.

*They* knew too, of course – those government people who lurked in the shadows, who shouldn't have been able to comprehend the depth and fragility of a man like Jim Hopper. But they could conceive of the light, even if it never touched them personally. They'd heard of love.

The man with the white hair and the dead eyes appeared at his door sometime in early '84.

Hopper had been at the Byers' house again. Since Will had returned – and Joyce, he noticed, never pried too far into the details of how and why, too thankful to have her son back to push her luck – his own house had grown stale and cold with disuse. It wasn't that he was dating Joyce in the conventional sense, so much as it was that she made him... feel again. Joyce, with all her extremes of passions overflowing, had seeped into the cracks within him left by his daughter's death, and patched him up like a kintsugi vase – imperfect, still, but whole in a slightly different way.

Those golden fault lines were on show for the whole town to see.

"Chief Hopper," the man began almost as soon as he cracked the door open. "You've rather shown your hand."

With that single utterance, Hopper was cornered with his heart on his sleeve. They offered an ultimatum; he either cooperated, or Joyce Byers met with an unfortunate accident. Maybe her car would skid on black ice on a late evening run back from the store. Maybe one of her boys would disappear again, and the town would be a little quicker to condemn her as mad, her home and livelihood taken away for her own safety. With that single threat, Hawkins' Chief of Police was no longer a servant of the law, but the puppet of whoever knew which strings to pull; an entire town in the palm of their hands, whose

silence had been ruthlessly bought, top down.

A nondescript black car would appear for him without warning: sometimes at the station after a long day's work; sometimes quietly purring behind him down an empty street. He would get in; they would tell him what to do, or say, or ignore; and he would complete his task with a sour taste in his mouth, which he'd wash away with as much alcohol as was required to make him pass out that particular night. He didn't tell Joyce.

Vying for number two on his list of regrets now were his betrayal of Eleven, and the willing betrayal of his integrity for the sake of one woman. Both these problems could be encompassed in uttering that single, fateful phrase: *"here's what's gonna happen. You're gonna let me and Joyce Byers go, and you're going to give us anything we need, and we're going to find her son."* They were right, Hopper thought. He had shown his hand. What kind of fool laid down a clumsy list of demands like that without expecting any kind of repercussion?

A lovesick fool, of course.

Sometimes, he wondered if he hated her. Mostly though, he thought he just hated himself. His visits to her house became more and more infrequent, until they tailed off all together. The sensation of self-loathing only increased when he saw the confusion and betrayal in the set of her lower lip whenever he passed her in the street – quickly, with only a grunted hello, as though they had never meant anything to each other; as though she hadn't redeemed him without even trying, with soft, cool hands and gentle words.

Hopper did not possess the calm mental foresight required to know quite what he thought he was achieving in avoiding Joyce, though he thought it was probably somewhere between trying to love her less, and trying to make Them *believe* he loved her less. He understood that he was trying to save someone, though whether it was Joyce or himself, he couldn't have said. As he saw less and less of her, and the parts of him she had mended began to crack all over again in new and painful ways, he wondered if he was saving anyone at all.

Joyce was resilient. She would survive. Joyce didn't crack, whatever people might think. She would take this as just another blow to her

soul and carry on; another cruelty from a world that had brought her so much hardship. And yet, Hopper thought, Joyce was never beaten by it. Joyce suffered, battered and bruised, buffeted by constant storms; but she always believed that the sun would come out eventually. She had faith in the world's goodness still, despite everything. She even had faith in him; Jim Hopper, who'd lost everything he'd loved and worked for twice over now, who was barely keeping it together on a diet of caffeine and pills. How could he take that away from her? The parts of him that were filled with her protested against it. He couldn't be responsible for the loss of her spirit, and he refused to endanger her life. Surely, he owed her something – the belief, at least, that her faith in him hadn't been misplaced.

The next time the black car came to collect him, Hopper was gone.

#### **Author's Note:**

I'm not entirely sure why Hopper would sell out Eleven for Will; certainly, I don't think it was anything as simplistic as 'because he rly rly luv's Joyce.' But hey, that's what fan fiction is for. It's nice to pretend it's all about love.